

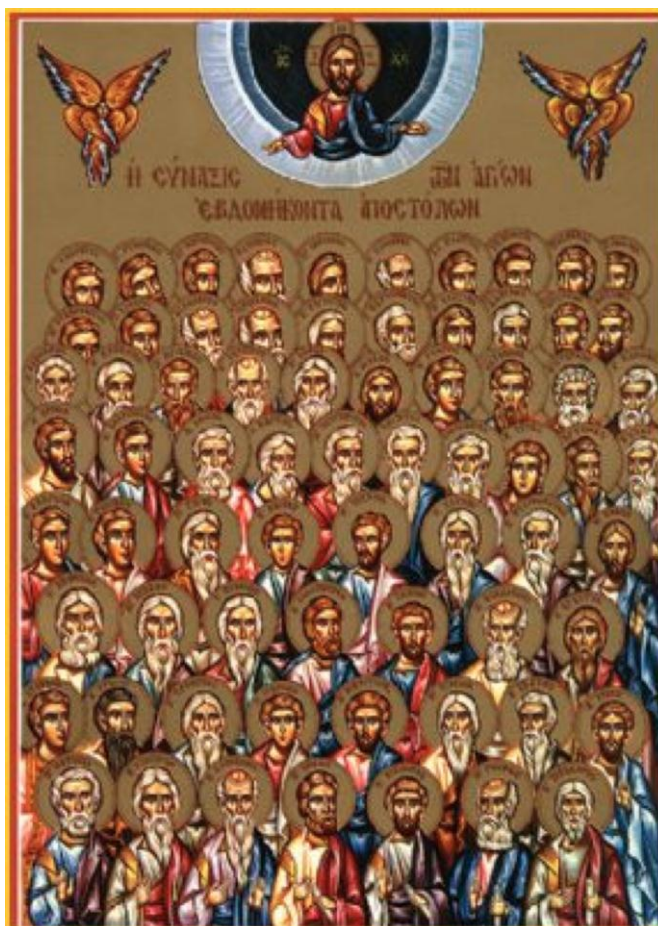


# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## HOLY ORDERS



Seventy Apostles, Ikonopisatelj, public domain.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that are best suited for your particular group.



## Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana  
Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.

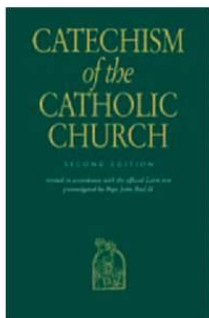


# Sharing Human Experience

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ What is your first impression when you hear the word Catholic priest?
- ▶ What does that term mean to you?
- ▶ If you were a person out in the world who knew very little about the Catholic Church, how might you answer that question?

(Probably everyone will respond by naming the wonderful things about their experience of the priests they have known and the charism of celibacy. Some people might bring up the media coverage of the scandals of recent years. Do not avoid their comments, but do not let the group be distracted by an extended discussion on the topic either.)



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 698, 1121, 1563, 1570, 1581, and 1533-34.

### Sacrament of Holy Orders

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Holy Orders is the sacrament by which a man is permanently made a deacon, a priest, or a bishop.
- ▶ The primary sign is the Bishop laying hands upon the head of the person who is being ordained.
- ▶ Only bishops can ordain.
- ▶ Ordination is understood as a sacrament, a visible sign that includes a hidden reality. For example, in the Eucharist, bread is the visible sign and the hidden reality is that it is also Christ's body.
- ▶ The visible sign in the sacrament of Holy Orders is the laying on of hands on the head of the candidate. The hidden reality is that through the sign the deacon, priest or bishop is made an effective representative of Jesus.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of four. Surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Consider the priests and deacons you know in your parish. In what way have you experienced the sacrament of their ministry? If the hidden reality is the presence, power, and ministry of Jesus himself, how have you experienced that in the priests and deacons you have experienced?
- ▶ What evidence in our priests and deacons of Christ's presence, life, and ministry can you name?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The ministry of the priest can also be described by the Latin term, *in persona Christi*. He functions "in the person of Christ." In other words, he is Christ's representative on earth. When he is acting *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Jesus, it is Christ himself who is acting and who is present. Christ is present in his work, his ministry, and in his actions.
- ▶ Our liturgy documents tell us that Christ is present to us in four ways when we celebrate the Mass.
  1. Christ is present in the gathered community. Thus, we are to be open to his presence when the community gathers for Mass.
  2. Christ is present when the Scriptures are proclaimed; it is as though Christ himself were speaking to us.
  3. Christ is also preeminently present in the elements of bread and wine.
  4. Christ is present in the person of the priest.
- ▶ The priest is a visible sign of Christ's presence to us; the hidden reality is Christ's effective action and presence in his ministry.
- ▶ A priest who is committed to his vocation lives a righteous, faithful life and is committed to serving God's people. His ministry is the greatest gift he could give to the people of God.

## Why Is this Sacrament Called "Orders"?

- ▶ The word "order" in ancient times referred to a civil group, a governing body.
- ▶ There is an order of priests, an order of deacons, an order of catechumens, an order of virgins, an order of spouses, and an order of widows, among others (CCC, #1537).
- ▶ Entrance into one of these groups or orders is accomplished with a special rite.
- ▶ Those who are preparing for baptism as adults celebrate a rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens. As such they are blessed and enter into the order of catechumens—it is part of the sacrament of baptism they will receive.
- ▶ The sacrament of holy orders and the sacrament of marriage are called sacraments of service because those who celebrate them place themselves at the service of communion (CCC, #1533).
- ▶ They are directed toward the salvation of others. They contribute to the salvation of the individual in so far as the individuals reach out to others and build up the body of Christ.

### What does “orders” mean?

- ▶ Ordination is the sacramental rite in which a man is incorporated into the order of bishops, or the order of presbyters (priests), or the order of deacons.
- ▶ A community does not elect or delegate a person to become a priest but it does play a role in helping call forth the candidates.
- ▶ The Holy Spirit gifts them with a sacred power that only comes from Christ.
- ▶ Through ordination Jesus himself sets apart and consecrates a man for ministry in the Church. The priesthood continues the priesthood of Jesus. Jesus builds up the Church through the ministerial priesthood.
- ▶ Ordination is conferred by the bishop who lays hands on the candidate and prays the prayer of consecration.
- ▶ Just as water is the sign of baptism, the laying on of hands is the sign of ordination. The visible sign is the laying on of hands; the hidden reality is the Holy Spirit who permanently consecrates the man with a special, sacred power (character) for service to the Church.

### Degrees of priesthood

- ▶ The catechism says that there are “two participations in the one priesthood of Christ” (#1546). These are the baptismal priesthood that all the faithful exercise (#1546), and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests (#1547); there are two degrees of “ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ”: episcopacy and presbyterate (#1554). Both these forms of priesthood—baptismal and ministerial—participate in the one priesthood of Christ.
- ▶ There are three degrees of holy orders: bishops, priests, and deacons.
- ▶ Bishop:
  - The highest office is bishop.
  - The office of bishop can be traced back to the apostles in an unbroken line of succession.
  - It is entrusted to the bishops to hand down the teaching of Jesus’ Apostles.
- ▶ Priests
  - Priests are coworkers of the bishop.
  - Priests and bishops are conferred with a special character that joins them to the priesthood of Christ.
  - Priests are ordained to:
    - preach the gospel;
    - celebrate the sacraments;
    - shepherd the flock;
    - lead a community of believers.
  - Priests most fully act in the person of Christ when they preside at the Eucharist.
  - Priests are to obey the bishop and serve under his authority.
  - Only men can be priests because the Church tells us that Jesus chose his ministerial priesthood from the Apostles who were men.
- ▶ The college of bishops (all the bishops speaking together) makes the mission of the twelve Apostles present to us today.



- ▶ Priests and bishops are ordained to a celibate life.
  - They are consecrated to God alone.
  - In the Eastern Church, married men can be ordained. However, if they become single they cannot marry again.
- ▶ Deacons
  - The sacred character (sacred gift) given to deacons empowers them to serve the Church, the people of God.
  - “Strengthened by sacramental grace [deacons] are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service (*diakonia*) of the liturgy, of the Gospel, and of works of charity” (CCC, #1588).

Witness: Invite a parish priest or deacon to give a brief witness about the power of his ordination.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ If the priest acts *in persona Christi*, does that mean the priest is perfect and cannot sin? If he acts in the person of Christ doesn't that mean he is perfect since Christ was perfect?
- ▶ No. Priests are sinners just like the rest of us. Sacraments make us holy. However, the sacrament of holy orders does not keep a deacon, priest or bishop from committing sins any more than our participation in the sacraments prevents us from sinning.

Catechist poses a question to Catholics that might be present. Catechist shares an experience from his or her own life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Does your participation in the sacraments prevent you from committing sin? What do the sacraments accomplish in you?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ It is important to remember that sacraments are not magic. We are given God's grace and God's strength in the sacraments.
- ▶ Sacraments should help us avoid sin, but we must be open to that help. We must prayerfully seek it; we must be conscious of it.
- ▶ Thus, priests should be able to draw from the strength of the sacrament they received just as married couples should be able to draw strength from the grace of the sacrament of marriage to help them stay faithful to their marriage covenant.
- ▶ Because we are sinners, however, we are not always open to receiving and cooperating with that grace. As with all sacraments, it requires a willingness on our part to cooperate with the grace of the sacrament.
- ▶ When a priest truly acts in the manner of Christ, when he is engaged in his mission and promoting the kingdom, when the priest celebrates the sacraments, regardless of whether he has committed serious sin or not, the sacrament is valid. Why? Because what takes place in the sacraments is the action of Christ. It is not dependent on the holiness of the priest. It is Jesus' work through the work of the priest.

- ▶ It is important to say that all Catholics—bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and laity—are to refrain from the sacraments if they are in serious sin. But, if a priest who has committed serious sin celebrates Mass, it is still a valid sacrament. The consecration of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ would be valid.
- ▶ The reason for this was stated earlier. Christ is the principal actor of the sacraments. Thus sacraments are effective even when performed by an unworthy minister. St. Thomas Aquinas reminded us that Christ might act even through a minister who is spiritually dead.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in dyads and then share insights in wider group. Catechist shares experience from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever had an experience of Christ as the principle actor in a ritual celebration?
- ▶ Describe your experience.
- ▶ What does your experience teach you about liturgy and about *in persona Christi*?

### Review

- ▶ What does the sacred character of ordination accomplish in the priest, in the deacon?
- ▶ What does *in persona Christi* mean?
- ▶ When does the priest most fully exercise his role as *in persona Christi*?
- ▶ Does a community elect a priest?
- ▶ What are the four ways Christ is present in the Mass?
- ▶ What is the sacramental sign of the sacrament of holy orders?
- ▶ Why is it important for the Church to have this important sacrament?
- ▶ How does it impact our lives?
- ▶ Is the Mass valid if a priest is in serious sin? What is the reason for your answer?



## Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in dyads.

- ▶ Considering all we have said about holy orders, how does this sacrament impact the lives of believers?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question with one other person.

- ▶ Can you relate what we have shared today in the liturgy, in our breaking open the word session, and in our session on holy orders to some experience in your life?
- ▶ How does this teaching concretely have anything to do with your life?



## Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question in the wider group.

- ▶ How does what we shared about the sacrament of holy orders challenge each of us to be a better disciple this week?
- ▶ What one thing are you willing to commit to as a result of what we have shared today in the gospel and in this session on the sacrament of holy orders?

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world. Discuss what, if any, activity/outreach is taking place in the parish this week that flows from the Church's teaching regarding itself.

### Journal

Question for reflection throughout the week: Use one of the questions above that were not asked in the session, and reflect on it in your journal throughout the week.



## Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions and Doxology ("Glory be to the Father..."), or a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2. If this is not a catechumenal setting, end with one or both of the Opening Prayers for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul in the Roman Missal. Include Intercessions and the Lord's Prayer.



## Appendix

#1. The sacrament of marriage presents the couple with an ongoing fountain of grace to sustain them throughout their lives. When I am conscious of that grace I am more able to avoid sin and refrain from saying or doing anything that would jeopardize our relationship. Cooperating with the grace of marriage gives us the strength to “not sweat the small stuff.” Cooperating with the grace of marriage allows us to forgive and to remember that marriage is an ongoing decision. Marriage and family life is the greatest gift I have been given; yet it is not easy. Love has grown over the years as we both have learned to lay down our lives for one another.

I recently became aware of how the grace of the sacrament does indeed give us the strength to avoid sin when we yield to it. There is a small issue over which my husband and I have argued in the past. Great strides have been made to address the issue over the years. Earlier in life I would have made the situation worse by making unwarranted, unnecessary, and hurtful comments. Not only do I no longer give in to that temptation, the issue itself has been put in the category of “small stuff” and is not the daunting issue it once was.

Every marriage deals with small issues that can turn into large issues if not addressed. The grace of the sacrament gives us strength to deal with such issues. However, we can forget and turn a blind eye to its power and continue with sinful, destructive behaviors or we can yield to God’s grace. Such is the power of all the sacraments.

#2. One Easter Vigil stands out in my memory as an experience of Christ as the principle actor. Our parish community sang their way through the creation story. With every acclamation, “And God saw that it was good,” the people raised their voices louder and louder. It was as if they were there at creation applauding the action of God as each day came into being. When it was time for the homily the pastor put down his notes and stood before the assembly. He asked the cantor to return to the microphone and continue to lead us in the acclamation over and over again, “And God saw that it was good!” He thundered his exhortation to us, “Sing it again!” We sang it again. “Sing it again!” “Do you believe that? Do you truly believe that? Do you believe that you are good? Do you believe that all creation is good? Believe it! It is true!”

He told us that there was no way he could give his planned homily. God was doing something mystical in our midst. We were all transfigured; the light of Christ’s presence was so bright that joy was palpable. The pastor invited the two altar servers to come forward. Both were beautiful, young adopted boys. The pastor invited us to look at God’s precious handiwork and to thank him that their biological mother “saw that they were good” and chose to give them life and, subsequently, wonderful parents to love them. He reminded us that if we truly believed in the goodness of *all* creation we could

transform the world. If all people believed in the goodness of all created things then all those same people would live in harmony, the peace that was promised at Eden. Hatred would be no more. War would be unnecessary. The world would be transformed by virtue of our acknowledgement of the goodness of God's creation.

There have been so many experiences of Christ as principle actor in the liturgy, but that Easter Vigil night stands out as a particularly amazing experience of Christ's presence.

## Handout on Holy Orders

### Sacrament of Holy Orders

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- ▶ It is important to remember that sacraments are not magic. We are given God’s grace and God’s strength in the sacraments.
- ▶ Sacraments should help us avoid sin, but we must be open to that help. We must prayerfully seek it; we must be conscious of it.
- ▶ Thus, priests should be able to draw from the strength of the sacrament they received just as married couples should be able to draw strength from the grace of the sacrament of marriage to help them stay faithful to their marriage covenant.
- ▶ Because we are sinners, however, we are not always open to receiving and cooperating with that grace. As with all sacraments, it requires a willingness on our part to cooperate with the grace of the sacrament.
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